

New Hampshire Special Education Program Approval Report

SAU # 34

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Final Report

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**Visitation Conducted on:
December 9 and 10, 1997**

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New Hampshire Special Education Program Approval Report

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Students With Disabilities

(Commendations, Citations, and Suggestions for each school)

Note: *It should be noted that suggestions are not considered corrective actions and therefore are given as technical assistance. The district is not mandated to implement them.*

New Hampshire Special Education Program Approval Report

SAU # 34 - Hillsboro

I. INTRODUCTION:

A New Hampshire Department of Education Special Education Program Approval visit was conducted at SAU # 34 comprised of the following schools: Washington Elementary School, Hillsboro-Deering Elementary School, Hillsboro-Deering Middle School and Hillsboro-Deering High School. The visiting team met on December 9 and 10, 1997 in order to review the status of Special Education services being provided to eligible students.

Activities related to this evaluation included the close review of all the teaching certifications of special education staff, analysis of SPEDIS data and random inspection of student records. Interviews were held with the special education director, building principals, regular and special education teachers and related service personnel and administrators as time and availability permitted. In addition, the team conducted parent interviews via phone. Throughout the visit the team had full cooperation from the school personnel and this helpfulness was greatly appreciated.

The report that you are about to read represents the consensus of all the members of the visiting team. Please keep in mind that this is a "report for exception", meaning that only exceptions to the N.H. State Standards have been addressed. If a component is not mentioned, that does not mean that the team did not review it; it just means that there were no citations of noncompliance to the Standards found in that particular area.

II. STATUS OF PREVIOUS ON-SITE: *Conducted on March 14-15, 1995*

Based on review of the previous program approval report and the findings of the team visiting the schools within the Hillsboro - Deering School District in December 1997, it was the consensus that the district has made an effort to address the citations from the previous on-site. However, there are several issues that continue to require attention and correction.

An area of non-compliance found in the previous on-site centered around the lack of well designed forms, as well as an out of date district plan for special education. Without the structure these systems would offer staff were making errors of omission concerning a number of special education procedures. The SAU wide citation at that time addressed these issues and directed the district to update and revise the local Special Education Plan to meet compliance with New Hampshire State Standards. The district is just now implementing the use of new forms, based on the state model forms, and has completed a draft of a newly revised local Special Education Plan. These efforts to insure that staff are given clear, consistent direction for all process and procedures is to be commended. However, as these improvements are fairly recent, the visiting team was unable to fully evaluate the effect these changes will make. They do note, however, that the improvements are well done and should prove effective in addressing a number of the paperwork details and routine procedures that are currently in non-compliance.

II. STATUS OF PREVIOUS ON-SITE: *(Con't.)*

The district was cited in 1995 for a lack of policy regarding high school diplomas for educationally disabled students and continues to lack such a policy. They were also cited for a lack of policy addressing the suspension of educationally disabled students. This has now been addressed in the new Procedure Manual.

All special education staff are currently certified or involved in an Alternative IV plan. However, there is only one staff member in the district certified in the area of emotional handicaps (the physical therapist at Washington Elementary School) and no one currently certified in the area of Mental Retardation (one staff member is currently pursuing Alt. IV for MR). As the district indicates that all three schools in Hillsboro provide services to students identified as mentally retarded and all four schools include students with emotional disabilities, it would follow that every effort should be made to hire individuals certified in those areas of disability.

Another concern raised by the previous team addressed the area of inservice training for all staff in the district, particularly as it related to the overall inclusion model. This area continues to require attention and staff again indicated that they would welcome more specific training in areas relating to the delivery of special education services.

The district was encouraged to become more technologically up to date and specifically to add computers to the elementary school. The district has made progress in this crucial area but should continue to work toward providing access to a variety of communication and information systems in an effort to offer all students the experiences and opportunities available through current technology.

In the area of clerical support the district was encouraged to consider providing clerical assistance to the special education director and this recommendation is made again.

III. ISSUES OF SIGNIFICANCE:

An issue of major significance to SAU # 34 has been the high rate of staff turnover in recent years. At the administrative, district and building level positions have seen quite a bit of change. This 1997-98 school year opened with a new superintendent, a new high school principal and an interim middle school principal. Another area of significant turnover is found in the area of special education staff, in both professional and paraprofessional positions. This frequent change in staff must be noted in the process of reviewing the present special education programs within this district as the inconsistencies seen in process and procedures may in part be due to frequent leadership and staff turnover.

The present administration is to be commended for their work toward establishing a district wide leadership model where consistency in philosophy and programming will have an important impact on the future of this school community. Specifically, the special education director is to be commended for her efforts to revise and implement a Local Plan for Special Education Procedures. This includes her initiation of the usage of the state model forms in each building as well as her weekly presence at in-house building level meetings to insure a consistent approach to special education process. It is also important to recognize the efforts of the school principals as they are providing daily support to the staff, regular and special education.

The district has made progress in the area of technology since the last special education visit in 1995. However, there continues to be a need for additional computer access, particularly in the pre-school program and in the broader area of providing all special educators with a more updated method of record keeping, report writing and IEP development. There are no special education secretaries or clerical assistants in this district and the amount of paperwork required of special educators is, at times, daunting and very time consuming. While, at the very least, a clerical assistant should be provided to the district's special education director, the availability of computers and relevant software should also be made available to special educators throughout this district.

III. ISSUES OF SIGNIFICANCE: (Con't)

The issue of providing inservice training to all staff throughout the district remains an area of particular need. Providing the best programming available to meet all students needs is a challenge to today's educators. The need for ongoing, extensive staff development in numerous areas of curriculum development, staff communication, implementation of individual student plans, among other areas, is necessary. Staff interviewed in SAU #34 expressed a similar theme and frequently noted that they would welcome opportunities for training in a wide variety of areas. This is even more important in a district where staff turnover is a significant factor.

A review of a random sample of the district's special education records revealed a number of inconsistencies in the completion of paperwork as it relates to special education process. Specifically, the team members present at student evaluation team meetings do not consistently identify themselves by role, making it impossible to determine if the team composition is correct. The implementation of the new special education forms should assist staff in the accurate completion of required information and provide the consistency that is now lacking.

The district does not presently have any specific programs for students identified as having an emotional disability. Further, the only staff member identified as holding EH certification within this district is the physical therapist based at the Washington Elementary School. The need for programming for the emotionally disabled students is clear, particularly at the middle school level and the district should begin to address this issue.

The visiting team was favorably impressed with the level of professionalism displayed by the district's staff. They found a consistent interest in program improvement and a sense of pride in the programs now in place. Staff demonstrated a sincere willingness to communicate and work together toward successful student programs.

IV. COMMENDATIONS, CITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:

SAU WIDE

Name of Program(s) Visited: All

COMMENDATIONS:

- The SAU is commended for the recent implementation of the revised special education forms.
- The SAU is commended for the district wide administrative support for special education programming.
- Staff are to be commended for their professionalism and interest in ongoing program development.
- Out of district student records are in excellent condition.

CITATIONS: (in numerical order)

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| <u>Ed # 1119.08</u> | The district does not have a clear policy regarding the opportunity available to educationally disabled students to complete course work leading to a high school diploma. |
| <u>Ed # 1107.07 (b)</u> | Evidence that evaluation teams are multidisciplinary was not consistently found in student records. |

SUGGESTIONS:

- A district wide plan for ongoing inservice training for all staff, including regular and special educators as well as paraprofessional staff, should be developed and implemented.
- Continued efforts to provide current technological support through computer access and programs should be made, particularly to assist special educators who presently devote a great deal of time to clerical activities.
- A clerical assistant should be provided to the district's special education director in an effort to offer district wide consistency in record keeping and to allow the special education director to devote her time to the critical issues of program development, staff supervision and evaluation, parent communication and other issues of professional significance.
- The district should begin to plan for programming to address the specific needs of the SAU's emotionally disabled students.
- Every effort should be made to employ special educators who hold MR and EH certifications.
- Ongoing efforts should be made to seek consistency in special education process in each building. Student records should reflect appropriate process in all areas of special education standards.
- The SAU needs to clarify the role of LEA representative and clearly indicate who is taking that role.
- All district staff are encouraged to work together to develop consistency in programming, as well as transition planning, for students, parents and staff as students move from one school to another.

Hillsboro Preschool

Program(s) Visited: Preschool

COMMENDATIONS:

- Program is small and well staffed with child centered individuals.
- There is a good balance between regular and special education students; good role models.
- The coordinator/teacher is skilled and knowledgeable about the students.

CITATIONS:

<u>Ed # 1107.02(b)</u>	1 file did not contain evidence of written notice of referral to parent.
<u>Ed # 1107.02(d)</u>	1 file did not contain evidence of written notice of disposition of referral within 15 days to parent(s).
<u>Ed # 1107.03(a)</u>	1 file: titles of individuals present at multidisciplinary evaluation not evident.
<u>Ed # 1107.05(k)</u>	1 file did not contain documentation of permission to evaluate. 1 file did not contain evidence that evaluation was completed within 45 days.
<u>Ed # 1107.07(c)</u>	1 file did not contain evidence that evaluation team consisted of appropriate personnel.
<u>Ed # 1107.07(c)(3)</u>	1 file did not contain evidence that LEA representative was present at evaluation meeting.
<u>Ed # 1109.01(l)</u>	1 file: no written documentation of transition plan from Preschool to Kindergarten (i.e. documentation of meeting, services, orientation, visit for child). Coordinator indicated process is done verbally.
<u>Ed # 1109.03(a-d)</u>	1 file: titles of individuals present at IEP meeting not evident. No evidence that LEA representative was present
<u>Ed # 1115.03</u>	1 file: titles of individuals present at placement team meeting not evident.
<u>Ed # 1115.06</u>	1 file did not contain evidence that least restrictive environment was discussed.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Provide inservice training on district special education policies and procedures. This training should help staff accurately and appropriately complete special education forms.
- Team criteria needs to be reviewed and more consistency applied; multi-disciplinary team defined.
- Participation at special education meetings should be documented, including persons title/role.

- Develop a formal documented transition program for Preschool to Kindergarten that includes child visitation, parent information and written documentation of future needs and services.

Washington Elementary School

Program(s) Visited:

1) Resource Room

2) Kindergarten

COMMENDATIONS:

- The staff provides a nurturing and structured environment for all students.
- Student records are neat and well organized.
- Staff and parents have an excellent teaming approach that trickles down to the students.

CITATIONS:

None

SUGGESTIONS:

- Provide a series of workshops on transition to staff, parents and students for those involved in transitioning from Washington Elementary to Hillsboro Elementary.
- Participation at special education meetings should be documented, including persons title/role.

Hillsboro-Deering Elementary School
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Program(s) Visited: 1) Classroom

COMMENDATIONS:

There is good communication between teachers and specialists.

The school office staff do a wonderful job and are a great liaison between the school and the public.

A positive rapport exists between regular and special education staff. The "team" environment is commendable.

CITATIONS:

Ed # 1107.02 2 files did not contain evidence of written referrals.

Ed # 1107.02(d) 1 file contained evidence written notice of referral to parents not completed within 15 days.

Ed # 1107.03(a) 1 file: titles of individuals present at multidisciplinary evaluation not evident.

Ed # 1107.05(k) 3 files: Evaluations were not completed within 45 days; no written extensions in file.

Ed #1107.07(c)(3) 3 files did not contain documentation of LEA representative present at evaluation meeting.

Ed # 1107.08(c) 1 file did not contain evidence classroom observation completed (last observation - 1994).

Ed #1109.01(f) 1 file: IEP did not contain statement of transportation services to be provided.

Ed #1109.01(h) 2 files: IEP did not contain clearly defined length of school day.

Ed #1109.01(I) 1 file lacked evidence of annual evaluation schedules.

Ed #1111.01 1 file lacked evidence of consideration of extended school year programming;
2 files lacked evidence ESY considered 60 days prior to start of program.

Ed #1115.06 All files did not contain evidence that least restrictive environment was discussed.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Provide inservice training on process to accurately and appropriately complete special education forms.
- Provide a system to aid in meeting required timelines for completing forms/paperwork.
- Team criteria needs to be reviewed and more consistently applied to multi-disciplinary meetings.
- Participation at special education meetings should be documented, including persons title/role.
- Increased communication between facilitators and service providers is encouraged.
- Develop a review system to ensure completion of assigned tasks/responsibilities.

- Provide a series of workshops on transition to staff, parents and students for those involved in transitioning to the middle school.

Hillsboro-Deering Middle School
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Program(s) Visited: 1) Life Skills 2) Inclusion

COMMENDATIONS:

- Student records were well maintained and organized.
- Bi-weekly progress reports based on forms completed by inclusion teachers is commended.
- Regular education teachers are commended for the variety and appropriateness of classroom modifications.

CITATIONS:

Ed # 1107.08(c) 1 file did not contain evidence that classroom observation was completed

Ed # 1107.05(k) 1 file did not contain evidence of parental permission to test.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Provide for in-service training in the area of classroom modifications for all educators.
- Increase time available for regular and special education teachers to meet for planning purposes.
- Participation at special education meetings should be documented, including persons title/role.
- The district needs to work with the middle school in providing an appropriate program for EH students.
- All staff are encouraged to develop communication and transition plans with elementary and high school staff. Working together may alleviate some of the anxiety associated with transition, as well as assist in the process of developing overall consistency in programming district-wide.
- Related service providers (O.T. & P.T.) should be available to students as determined necessary by the SEE/PT to students at the middle school.

Hillsboro-Deering High School

Program(s) Visited: 1) Resource Room 2) Life II

COMMENDATIONS:

- The Life II program is well staffed with adequate supplies and materials and meets the needs of all the students.
- There is excellent communication among resource room staff.
- Staff are very invested in the programs and the students.
- Several aides are also certified teachers.

CITATIONS:

<u>Ed # 1107.02(b)</u>	3 files: referral form was incomplete or missing; did not include date or the name of person making the referral.
<u>Ed # 1107.02(d)</u>	1 file: parents' permission to test was dated after testing was done. 1 file did not contain record of notice to parent.
<u>Ed # 1107.05</u>	1 file: date missing from parent consent to evaluate.
<u>Ed # 1107.07(c, 3)</u>	1 file: no evidence of LEA representative at evaluation team meeting. 1 file: no evidence of regular education teacher in attendance. 1 file: no evidence of special education teacher in attendance.
<u>Ed # 1109.01(b), (i)</u>	1 file: short-term objectives are not specific; evaluation criteria is not clear.
<u>Ed # 1109.01(j)</u>	2 files: difficult to determine who was responsible for provision of services.
<u>Ed # 1111.01</u>	1 file: extended school year programming determination was not completed by April 30 or 60 days prior to starting.
<u>Ed #1125.04(a)</u>	1 file: did not contain written consent to evaluate.

SUGGESTIONS:

- The district is encouraged to provide inservice training, particularly in the areas of inclusionary practices, to regular and special education staff.
- Provide inservice training on process to accurately and appropriately complete special education forms.
- All staff are encouraged to work closely with the middle school staff in an effort to provide consistency in programming and a smooth transition for students.

- Special education staff need a private space to make phone contacts, as well as for the completion of paperwork and confidential conferences.

ADDENDUM

JAMES O. MONITORING PROGRAM

SAU #34

Student File Review

Case Study Document

Reimbursement Claim Form

Case Study Addendum Form

<p style="text-align: center;">ADDENDUM JAMES O. MONITORING PROGRAM</p>

SAU #34

CITATIONS:

- There are no specific citations regarding the files reviewed at SAU #34. Records are kept in good condition with accurate, up to date information and appropriate process and procedures followed.
- In the case of one student's record the involvement of the parent was absent, however, there is clear documentation of the district's appropriate and timely request for a surrogate parent.

SUGGESTIONS:

There are no specific suggestions relevant to the monitoring of the James O. Program.